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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2880
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5236
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 0092
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3480
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000672

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN AND INL

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: LOCALS RECOUNT LIVES MARRED BY DRUG
ADDICTION

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: In conversations with Iran Watcher, two Turkmen women candidly described how addiction to heroin and opium, the drugs of choice for Turkmenistan's addicts, has affected members of their own families and communities. The two women, of differing socioeconomic backgrounds, both attended Turkmenistan's most prestigious university. Their accounts of the addicts, all of whom they know personally, depict a drug situation of disturbing proportions. END SUMMARY.

THE ADDICT UNCLE: "I'M GOING TO DIE HERE"

12. (SBU) The first woman, originally from the province of Dashoguz, resides in the Ashgabat district of Khitrovka, where she estimates that "every third home" has either a drug addict or dealer in it. She described how her maternal aunt, now in her late 30's, has been married for 15 years to a Dashoguz laborer unable to break an addiction to smoking opium. The couple has one child, a 13-year old daughter. Her husband reportedly began smoking opium early in their marriage, and eventually resorted to selling the family's possessions to buy drugs. At one point, about ten years ago, the situation became so unbearable that her aunt used a part of her assets to send her husband to a drug rehabilitation center in Russia. He reportedly stayed away from drugs for a period and stayed on in Russia, working there as a laborer and sending home money to the family. Later, however, he fell back on drugs and the remittances stopped coming. He returned to Dashoguz, where his wife purchased a car for him to use for a taxi business, but he reportedly could not stop using drugs. In frustration, his wife again arranged for treatment for him in Russia, after which he again found employment there. After he lost his job in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, however, he began using drugs again and called home to tell his wife, "I'm ging to die here and no one will find my body." She traveled to Russia to bring him home again. Now he is back in Dashoguz, unemployed and spends his days smoking opium, depleting whatever assets his wife is able to accumulate from the traditional Turkmen embroidery that she stitches for sale.

Her own family has shunned her, telling her she must chose between them and her addict husband.

13. (SBU) The same contact also told of another acquaintance in Dashoguz, a man in his thirties from a prominent local family, who began using drugs 15 years ago when he came to Ashgabat to attend university. His family reportedly purchased him an apartment and car to use during that time in Ashgabat, and he later became acquainted at a party with a local drug seller, who offered him drugs free of charge "just to try." He eventually began holding parties regularly at his apartment where opium use was customary. He later earned a degree in petroleum engineering, but has never broken the opium habit and has been unable to hold a job. Now married with two children, he lives in a separate room in his parents' home in Dashoguz, eats alone, and never sees guests who visit the home. He had been stealing his parents' possessions to purchase drugs, after which his parents had him involuntarily committed to the large state-run treatment center in Dashoguz. According to our contact, "no one ever gets cured" at the center, where physicians reportedly sell drugs "under the table" to the patients they are treating. She said that the addict's parents now prefer to give him money regularly to purchase drugs, and that his wife continues living with her in-laws, who treat her "like a housekeeper."

14. (SBU) Our second contact, from a prominent family in Ashgabat, is in her early 30's and was widowed several years ago. Her late husband came from a well-off family that is closely connected to the government. Her former brother-in-law, now in his early forties, has been addicted to opium for twenty years, she said. According to his parents, he began using drugs after a neighbor, himself a drug dealer, provided him with opium to smoke. (NOTE: According to our contact, smoking opium is the means favored

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by well-off Turkmen addicts, whereas the poor tend to inject lower-quality heroin. END NOTE.) Although he earned a degree in dentistry, according to our contact, he has never held a job and is "always high." Married with one child, he now lives alone in a separate apartment that the family owns. His family sent him to drug treatment centers in Russian and Krygystan, without success. He had been stealing his parents' possessions to buy opium, but they have since resorted to giving him money for drugs. He has apparently sold all of his possessions and now sleeps on the bare floor of his apartment.

A FORTUNE IN THE JEWELRY BUSINESS, LOST TO ADDICTION

15. (SBU) The same contact also told of a close family friend and talented jeweler in Ashgabat, the father of two children, who earned a small fortune trading in jewelry and precious gems in a business he opened more than ten years ago. According to our contact, after he became wealthy, he fell victim to "boredom" and "wondered how to spend all his money," at which point he began smoking opium. Within six months, she said, the jeweler had lost his business and all of his money to drug use. (Based on her own observations, our contact estimates that about ten percent of Turkmenistan's wealthy are addicted to drugs). She said that her family has lost contact with the jeweler/addict, who was last seen begging on the street about three years ago. "I doubt that he is even still living," she said.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: The more we talk to locals about drugs and drug addiction in Turkmenistan, the more ominous things seem. President Berdimuhamedov, through the State Counter Narcotics Service, has made the pursuit of drug suppliers a priority. Newspapers have begun to report regularly on the arrest of dealers and the stiff penalties they receive. From all accounts, however, drug demand is at the center of the problem, and extends far beyond the "30,000" addicts that the government has admitted to publicly. As the local head of a

UN agency told us recently, the young Turkmen women in his office have told him of they are afraid of marrying a Turkmen man. "These days," they reportedly said, "You never know who is an addict." END COMMENT.

MILES